

portion at said edge. Accordingly, Applicants direct the Examiner's attention to Figure 1 and Column 7, lines 44-50 as support for said amendment.

Turning to the rejections based upon the art, Applicants note that the claims have been rejected under 35 USC 102(e) as being anticipated by Yamasaki et al. (US Patent No. 5,839,752). In addition, the '752 patent has been relied upon by the Examiner as the principle reference for the rejections of the claims under 35 USC 103(a). The Examiner also cited US Patent No. 6,237,935 to Grey et al. as a secondary reference in support of the rejections under 35 USC 103. Applicants herein respond as follows.

Turning to Yamasaki '752, it is noted that said reference relates to a thermoformed air bag cover having multiple layers, but the same underlying skin composition across the entire surface of the panel. This is immediately apparent upon review of Figure 1 of the '752 patent which illustrates skin layer 13, foam layer 15 and barrier layer 14. There simply then is no question that Yamasaki '752 discloses and teaches that the skin layer 13 and barrier layer 14 are the same at every point in the instrument panel and at the air bag opening.

With this in mind, the Examiner's attention is directed to pending claim 1. The Examiner will note that said claim recites a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive interior panel surrounding the air bag deployment portion of the panel, the main body skin portion comprising a first plastic material, and an air bag cover skin portion adapted to cover the air bag deployment portion of the automotive interior panel. The claim goes on to recite a bond attaching the main body skin portion to the air bag cover skin portion.

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Hopefully, it is now immediately clear to the Examiner that the principal reference relied upon, Yamasaki '752, fails to teach or suggest anything resembling an automotive interior panel of a main body skin portion surrounding the air bag deployment portion of the panel and the bond attaching the main body skin portion to the air bag cover skin portion. Stated another way, nowhere in Yamasaki '752 is there any teaching or suggestion of a main body skin portion adapted to cover at least a portion of the automotive interior panel surrounding the air bag deployment portion of the panel, since Yamasaki '752 discloses and teaches that the upper skin layer 13 and lower barrier layer 14 are the same at every point on the instrument panel and at the air bag opening.

Turning next to independent claim 36, Applicants wish to point out that said claim requires a method forming a skin for an automotive interior panel wherein the skin comprises a main body skin portion for covering most of the outer surface of the panel, and an air bag cover portion bordered by the main body skin portion for covering only an air bag deployment portion of the air bag cover panel. The claim goes on to recite forming the air bag skin portion by casting a second plastic material against the second surface area of the heated shell tool bounded by the first surface area. Once again, Applicants wish to point out that nowhere in Yamasaki '752 is there any teaching or suggestion for the formation of a skin comprising a main body skin portion for covering most of an outer surface of the panel, and an air bag cover skin portion bounded by the main body skin portion for covering only an air bag deployment portion. Once again, Yamasaki '752 disclose and teach that upper skin layer 13 and lower barrier layer 14 are the same at every point on the instrument panel and at the air bag opening.

The Examiner's attention is next directed to claim 52. As noted, claim 52 now recites a main body skin portion comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge and an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge to the main body skin portion. In a related manner, independent claim 88 recites a method for forming a skin for an automotive panel, the method comprising the steps of forming a main body skin portion comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge and forming an air bag cover skin portion at said edge.

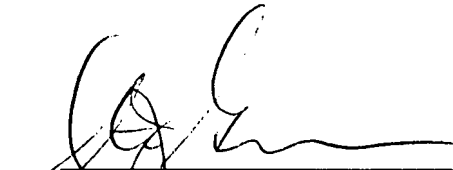
Accordingly, it should again be clear to the Examiner that there is simply no question that Yamasaki '752 fails to disclose or teach such features of Applicant's invention. Again, Yamasaki '752 discloses and teaches that the upper skin layer 13 and lower barrier layer 14 are the same at every point on the instrument panel and at the air bag opening.

Applicant's would like to further expand upon the arguments noted above. In the present invention, the first plastic material makes up the main body skin portion and the second plastic material makes up the air bag cover skin portion and the air bag cover skin portion is connected at an edge of the main body skin portion. Therefore, the air bag cover skin portion above the air bag dispensing apparatus is different (either in ductility as recited in claims 1 and 36 or Tg as recited in claims 52 and 88). Such feature is entirely missing in Yamasaki '752, as Yamasaki '752 discloses and teaches that the upper skin layer 13 and lower barrier layer 14 are the same at every point on the instrument panel and at the air bag opening. Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that Yamasaki et al. actually teaches away from the subject manner of the present invention.

Finally, Applicant notes the Examiner's citation to the secondary reference of Grey et al. (US 6,237,935). Since the principle of reference of Yamasaki '752 fails to disclose, teach or suggest the present invention it is respectfully submitted that the reference to Grey et al. '935 no longer supports a rejection under the provisions of 35 USC 103.

Having dealt with all the outstanding rejections, Applicants respectfully submit that the application is in condition for allowance. Allowance at an early date is solicited.

Respectfully submitted,


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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as First Class Mail in an envelope addressed to: Assistant Commissioner of Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231 on December 18, 2004, at Manchester, New Hampshire.

By Kenneth S. Grossman



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52. (Amended) A skin for an automotive panel comprising:
a main body skin portion comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge;
an air bag cover skin portion connected at said edge to the main body skin portion, the air bag cover skin portion comprising a second plastic material having a glass transition temperature lower than a glass transition temperature of the first plastic material.

88. (Amended) A method of forming a skin for an automotive panel, the method comprising the steps of:

forming a main body skin portion comprising a first plastic material and an opening comprising an edge;

forming an air bag cover skin portion at said edge, the air bag cover skin portion comprising a second plastic material having a glass transition temperature lower than a glass transition temperature of the first plastic material; and

connecting the main body skin portion and air bag cover skin portion together.